



TEACHING TIPS: GERMS AND YOUR HEALTH

All around us are millions of tiny living things that can be seen only through a microscope (pronounced mike'-ro-scope). They are called microbes (mike'-robes). Most microbes do us no harm, but a few can cause sickness. They are called germs. Examples of germs and the diseases they cause include:

- *Bacteria* cause some types of pneumonia, syphilis, tetanus, tuberculosis, gonorrhea, typhoid fever, whooping cough and strep throat.
- *Viruses* cause colds, flu, mumps, polio, measles and smallpox.
- *Fungi* (fun'-ji) cause athlete's foot, ringworm of the scalp and other infections.

Germs can be carried by people who do not feel sick, as well as by those who are sick. In both cases, the germs can be passed on to other people. Usually, germs leave the person's body in one or more of the following ways:

- *Nose and mouth.* Germ-carrying droplets of moisture and mucus escape into the air when we exhale (breathe out), cough, talk, sneeze or blow our noses. Common diseases that are spread this way are:

colds	whooping cough
mumps	scarlet fever
measles	polio
tuberculosis	flu (influenza)
pneumonia	
- *Intestinal or urinary tracts.* Some germs leave the body in solid and liquid waste material. These include:

typhoid fever
dysentery (diarrhea, etc.)
polio
tapeworms

- *Open sores.* The venereal diseases (syphilis and gonorrhea) can be spread by germs and pus or drainage from open sores. Outbreaks of food poisoning (causing cramps and diarrhea) are often caused by germs found in sores on the hands and arms of people who prepare or serve food. Open sores should be covered with a clean cloth or bandage. If sores do not heal within a few days, a doctor should be consulted.

Diseases are spread directly from one person to another. But, they also may be spread indirectly through an object that has been contaminated (con-tam'-in-ated). For example, a direct spread of germs occurs when a person sneezes and germs are passed to another person. An indirect spread occurs if a person with a scalp infection leaves germs on a comb and a second person uses the contaminated comb and transfers the germs to her scalp.

One of the best ways to stop the spread of diseases is to practice good hygiene—not just when we feel ill, but all the time! The handout mentions several ways to do this. Remember that setting an example is a good way to teach others. Be sure that your personal hygiene habits set a good example for others to follow.

Some diseases can be prevented by immunization (im-mew-niz-a'-shun). Usually, a doctor or nurse gives the vaccine in a shot. But with polio immunization, the vaccine is taken by mouth.

As you probably realize, it is not yet possible to immunize (im'-mew-nize) people against all diseases. This is true of colds, some forms of flu, syphilis, gonorrhea and many other diseases. Polio, mumps, measles, rubella (German

measles), whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria can be prevented by immunization. Because these diseases can be very serious, all people should be protected from them.

Doctors can provide the necessary immunizations. In some communities, county and city health departments, health clinics and neighborhood health centers have immunization programs. Health authorities recommend starting immunizations at approximately 2 months of age. Be sure that families with young children understand this and have their children immunized.

Your county Extension agent (home economics) knows about programs or clinics in your area that provide free or low-cost immunizations. Encourage families to take advantage of these services.

Protection from some diseases is so important that Texas, and many other states, have laws that require children to be immunized against the following diseases before they can enter school:

Diphtheria

Tetanus

Measles (10-day or red measles)

Rubella (3-day or German measles)

Polio

Pertussis (whooping cough) immunization is required for children in child care facilities but

is not required for first grade and above. However, children have often been immunized against this disease because it is usually given with the diphtheria and tetanus immunization in what is commonly called a DTP shot.

As of September 1979, Texas children entering the first grade will also be required to be immunized against mumps.

Some doctors and clinics also encourage skin tests for tuberculosis. Further information about immunization and disease protection is available from your county Extension agent (home economics).

Remember: Your germs are private . . . Keep them to yourself.

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